



Sustainable Development in Chiang Mai

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Location

This summer I travelled to Chiang Mai, Thailand for my global independent study. Chiang Mai is the largest city in Northern Thailand and is the capitol of Chiang Mai Province. I spent several weeks learning about sustainable development with professors and students at Chiang Mai University.

Environmental Concerns in Thailand

Thailand's dramatic economic growth has caused numerous environmental concerns. The country faces problems with air and water pollution, declining wildlife populations, deforestation, soil erosion, water scarcity, and waste issues. When I was there, I spent time learning about social concerns in Chiang Mai that are also affecting sustainable development including the Burmese refugee crisis and migrant populations in Northern Thailand.



Project Information

For my project this summer I travelled to Thailand to learn more about sustainable development. I spent time with professors and students at Chiang Mai University in the Regional Center for Sustainable Development there to see firsthand how their school is responding to issues as diverse as climate change, the Burmese refugee crisis, and polluted water.

Outcomes

In the course of my three week global field placement, I had the opportunity to engage with various professionals and other stakeholders, including students, faculty, and staff at Chiang Mai University. My major accomplishments include:

- Research on sustainability issues facing East Asian countries
- Writing a paper about my learning and findings during my time in Thailand
- Developing friendships and relationships with faculty and students at Chiang Mai University.
- Increasing my knowledge and awareness in these important topics. Ideally I will be able to share this learning with others in my future career and endeavors.



Skills Developed

From the global field experience, I increased my ability to:

- Engage cross-culturally and communicate effectively with individuals from diverse backgrounds
- Engage in multilingual, multicultural environmental efforts
- Appreciate the role of and need for global social work

Lessons Learned

It can take a long time to build trust and relationships with community members, especially in a culture different than your own.

- It was important for me to spend time before my departure thinking about my role during this trip and recognizing that I was there primarily to learn and to engage in conversation with individuals there. It is important to listen well and actively during your global field experience, not just to simply “do” a project or have a specific outcome.



Career Connections

I will certainly take these connections and lessons with me into the future. I hope that other University of Michigan students will have the opportunity to build off of the connections that I made this past summer in Chiang Mai as I feel that it is of the utmost importance to continue building bridges and collaborating with other countries to create sustainable, effective, and lasting partnerships and change.



Advice

- Read a book on your country before departure. I found that the reading that I did beforehand allowed me to have a greater appreciation of the historical context that I was entering
- I would also recommend that students practice the local language before their departure date. Those that you engage with will appreciate that you took initiative to be a part of their life and language.
- Keep a journal with you before you leave and throughout your journey- it is fun to look back and reflect on your journey.
- Reach out to other connections you know who may have been to that country before

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